

MOREOVER

THE SEDUCTRESS

HER technique of seducing men was not subtle. She simply sent them a note through her hair dresser that if they were so inclined, she was more than willing.

Everyone was because she was ravishingly beautiful. The note in Urdu read: "Agar aap mujhko chahatey hain to yeh gulab khudesi farmayeye, warna toon vapoor kar dootaye" (If you desire me, please accept this rose, otherwise send it back).

The rose which accompanied the offer never came back and a torrid affair followed. Unfortunately for Madhubala she forwarded an identical invitation with a rose to two men who had become close friends.

While she was having a no-holds-barred affair with the *mushanda* (muscular) Punjabi actor Prem Nath, she sent another note and rose to the Pathan, Yusuf Khan, (Dilip Kumar). The two buddies were in the habit of gossiping about their conquests. They discovered to their chagrin that while they were slapping their macho chests over having conquered the most sought after film star of Bollywood, she had in fact, fooled them.

How Madhubala resolved the sex triangle is not known except that she gave up the note 'n' rose approach for safer but equally effective means of seducing men.

Who was Madhubala? Her real name was Mumtaz Jahan Begum Dehlavi. As her surname indicated she was born in Delhi on February 14, 1933, the third of six daughters of an indigent Pathan Ataulah Khan and his begum.

When Ataulah Khan was fired from his job in the Imperial Tobacco Company, he had very little left to feed his family, then consisting of a wife and three daughters, the youngest being uncommonly pretty and precocious.

He sensed she was the only capital he had which properly invested might yield enough interest to keep them alive. So he bought third class tickets to Mumbai Central and on arrival in the metropolis found lodgings in the corner of a buffalo shed in Jogeshwari.

The quest for a film career for his daughter began in right earnest. Every morning with his daughter in tow he did the rounds of film studios and homes of film celebrities to get roles for the girl.

Even at 12, Mumtaz was an eye-catching little nymphet. Devika Rani spotted her talent and suggested she change her name. So Mumtaz Jahan Begum Dehlavi became Madhubala.

Madhubala began with child roles at Rs 300 per month. This was not good enough for her or her greedy father. The break came with Kidar Sharma, then a leading film-maker and as old as Madhubala's father. He fell for the girl. She knew the rules of the game. As Sharma was to admit ruefully in his later years: "These parents only pose as being strict. In the film industry, every girl has gone through bedrooms. Madhubala was no exception."

Sharma's actress wife Kamala Chatterji died suddenly. Madhubala stepped into her shoes as a leading actress and a lady friend. She kept Sharma's hopes alive and took on another lover, Mohan Sinha.

Then came Kamal Amrohi, the suave and smooth talker. His *Mahal* was a box office hit. It catapulted Madhubala to astral heights. She became rich. She fell for the much married Amrohi, father of three children

ily if he would marry her. Amrohi refused to be drawn into the deal.

Madhubala moved on to her next man, the rustic, earthy, Prem Nath. While the affair was still on, she seduced Dilip Kumar.

K. Asif's *Mughal-e-Azam* which took nine years in the making put both Madhubala and Dilip Kumar in the top of Mumbai's film world with substantial increases in their bank

balances. There was much talk about their getting married.

But trouble was on the way. Both had signed up with H. R. Chopra for *Naya Daur*. Madhubala refused to go for outdoor shootings.

Chopra took her to court. Her relationship with Dilip Kumar was one of the issues.

When questioned in court, Dilip Kumar confessed, "I have Madhubala and she always loves her." But he refused to marry her.

Madhubala took him to court for a breach of promise to marry. Nothing came of the case. She moved on to other lovers — Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then a barrister practising in the Bombay High Court.

She had the option of marrying three men — Pradeep Kumar, married to Mala Sinha and father of two, Bharat Bhushan, widower, and Kishore Kumar married to a blue stocking Ruma Ghosh in the IAS.

She found Pradeep okay but too serious. Bhushan was a bore. Kishore was a crackpot but full of fun and laughter. She opted for Kishore. He converted to Islam and was renamed Karim Abdul. They had a civil marriage followed by a Muslim *Nikah* followed by a Hindu marriage. His parents never forgave him.

A closely kept family secret was that Madhubala was born with a defective heart. Right from the time she started her film career she had violent fits of coughing and spat out blood.

Kishore Kumar flew her to London for treatment. The surgeons refused to perform heart surgery as it was too late. Her marriage to Kishore Kumar was not as much fun and laughter as she had dreamt of. She had lost the will to live.

Lyricist Naushad recalls lines she recited at their last meeting: "Jab kashtee saabit aur saalim thee, jeeney ke tamanna thee mujh ko. Ab ussee zikasta kashtee par jeeney ke tamanna kaun karey?"

She died on February 27, 1964 at the age of 33. She was buried in the Muslim cemetery at Santa Cruz. She could justify her life in the words of an American poet:

*I burn my candle at both ends
It gives a lovely light
But oh my friends, and oh my foes
It will not last the night*

Not being much of a film goer, I am ashamed to admit that I have not seen even one of the 70 films in which Madhubala starred.

But I was fascinated to read Mohan Deep's biography *The Mystery and Mystique of Madhubala* (Magna Books). Mohan Deep is an established writer of fiction and poetry in Sindhi and English. He writes for several film journals as well as serious newspapers.

He is a gifted gossip writer and has brought Madhubala alive. After reading his biography, I have one regret. I came to live in Mumbai the year Madhubala left it and never out to

Romance, deceit, fame and tragedy were part of the mystique called Madhubala. Mohan Deep's biography has brought the actress alive, says Khushwant Singh



ENIGMA: Madhubala remained much sought after till her death